

FitFacts®

What is the Mediterranean Diet?

THE MEDITERRANEAN DIET HAS LONG BEEN CONSIDERED ONE OF THE HEALTHIEST, MOST USER-FRIENDLY EATING PLANS AROUND. IT IS NOT A STRICT 'DIET', BUT RATHER REFLECTS THE LIFESTYLE OF THOSE LIVING IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION DURING THE 1960'S. THESE PEOPLE ENJOYED LONG LIVES WITH LOW RATES OF CHRONIC DISEASE AS A RESULT OF EATING A DIET RICH IN PLANT-BASED FOODS, HEALTHY FATS, AND MODERATE ALCOHOL. THEIR LIFESTYLE ALSO EMBRACED REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND LEISURELY MEALS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

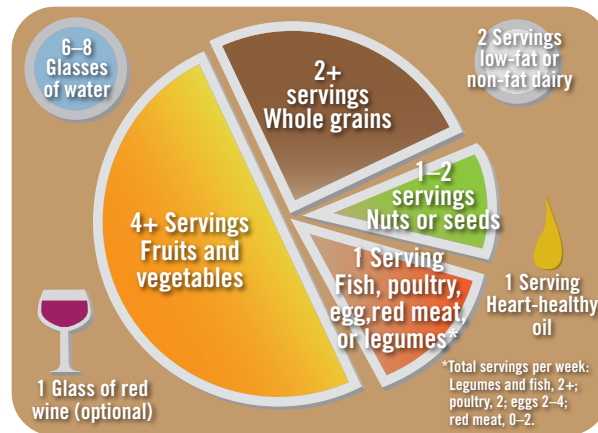
A growing amount of research supports the numerous health benefits of the Mediterranean diet. Living the Mediterranean lifestyle reduces your risk for the following diseases:

- Heart disease (heart attack, stroke, high blood pressure, high cholesterol)
- Diabetes
- Cancer
- Parkinson's disease
- Alzheimer's disease
- Metabolic syndrome

Follow these steps to live the Mediterranean way:

1. Make your diet rich in "plant-based foods":

- Fill your plate with fresh, in-season fruits and vegetables
 - 4+ servings of each per day
 - Consume a variety of colors and textures [exception: white potatoes— \leq 3 per week]
 - 100% fruit or vegetable juice is acceptable in moderation.
 - Fruit is excellent in place of high-fat desserts.
- Make half of your grains fiber-rich 'whole grains'
 - 2+ servings per day
 - Choose grains that list the whole grain(s) first or second on the ingredient list, those labeled as "100% whole grain," and those with at least 8 grams of whole grain per ounce.
- Enjoy protein-packed nuts, seeds, and legumes (beans)
 - 1–2 [low sodium] servings of nuts or seeds per day (olives fit in here, too)
 - Substitute legumes for meat in your favorite recipes 2+ times per week.
- Use heart-healthy olive oil in place of other fats
 - Incorporate 1 tablespoon (per person) of extra virgin olive oil into most main meals
- Boost flavor in your recipes by adding antioxidant-rich herbs and spices
 - These are also an excellent substitute for sodium, which raises blood pressure.



2. Choose wisely in the meat department

- Make omega 3-rich fatty fish your main dish 2+ times per week (salmon, sardines, tuna, mackerel, herring)
- Eat white-meat, skinless poultry (2 per week) and eggs (2–4 per week)
- Limit red meat (<2 times per week) and processed meat (<1 per week)

3. Switch to low-fat or nonfat dairy

- 2 servings per day

4. Consume sugar-sweetened beverages, baked goods, and other processed foods sparingly

5. Adopt a physically active lifestyle

- Engage in regular physical activity, such as brisk walking, for 30 minutes on most days of the week
- Build activity into your day (i.e. take the stairs instead of the elevator, park further away, etc.)

6. Drink 6–8 glasses of water throughout the day

7. Get adequate rest

8. Dine often with friends and family

- Families who eat together regularly enjoy better health.

9. Make a toast to a long, healthy life

- Research supports that those who enjoy wine in moderation, as part of the Mediterranean lifestyle, have longer, healthier lives. [Men: 1–2 glasses per day, Women: ½–1 glass per day]
- Consult your health care provider if you are unsure if this is safe for you.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[American Council on Exercise](#)

Bach-Faig, A., et al (2011). Mediterranean diet and pyramid today. Science and cultural updates. *Public Health Nutrition*. 14 (12A), 2274-2284.